Our world is a dual world – a world of 'material things', and a world of 'inner meanings'. When one raises oneself to a level where material things become secondary and inner meanings become of prime importance, then one is a spiritual person.

How do We Attain Spirituality?

There are two major schools of spiritual discipline: one based on meditation and the other on contemplation. The former relates to the heart and the latter relates to the mind.

Spirituality of the heart is generally taken to mean the opposite of worldliness. It advocates only one way to preserve one's spirituality, and that is to retire to a desolate place, leaving behind one's homes and material lives, where there is nothing to provoke oneself and undertake meditation. It is this viewpoint, which is presented in the well-known book titled, "The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari."

Man is an intellectual being. He is endowed with a mind, which is his greatest faculty. Real spirituality or contemplative spirituality is that which has the power to address our minds.

I believe that 'heart-based spirituality' takes man to a level, which is, in fact, one of ecstasy. Particular practices and chants produce an ecstatic feeling within the practitioner. There are many methods of meditation for spiritual discipline, which have been prevalent in one form or the other since ancient times. Whenever man raises himself above worldly matters and devotes his life to becoming one with the non-material world through meditation, he experiences a very different kind of feeling. When man enters this state of ecstasy, he experiences an unknown pleasure. On the basis of this experience, people associate ecstasy with spirituality. However ecstasy is nothing but a reduced form of spirituality. Personally, I subscribe to the school of contemplation. Man is an intellectual being. He is endowed with a mind, which is his greatest faculty. Real spirituality or contemplative spirituality is that which has the power to address our minds. Any kind of spirituality attained at a level lesser than that of our minds is not true spirituality.

Contemplative Spirituality

According to the German philosopher, Nietzsche, the secret of bringing a developed man into existence lay in self-thinking. But in my opinion, that is a half-truth. The whole truth is that the secret of producing a developed man lies in anti-self thinking. The reason for this is that everyone lives in some society or the other. This society continually exercises formative influences on his mind, until finally his thinking becomes totally conditioned by those influences.

The process of spiritual or intellectual development in fact begins with the de-conditioning of this conditioned mind. The more one de-conditions the mind, the more one will gain in spiritual or intellectual development. Everyone is born spiritual. Everyone is Mr. Nature or Mr. Spiritual by birth. But, after birth, he lives in a society, which continues to condition him. Contemplative spirituality makes it possible to erase this conditioning and allows the individual to revert to the natural state in which he was born. Spiritual science is, in effect, another name for the de-conditioning of the mind. There can be no spirituality without this.

Now the next question is that how can this de-conditioning take place? There is only one formula for this: Learn to say, "I was wrong." Many times in our lives we are confronted with situations in which we realize that we were wrong in our thoughts, speech or actions. However, in almost all such situations, we do not have the courage to say that we were wrong. This stops our de-conditioning process. It is only when we openly say that we were wrong and accept the truth that our de-conditioning continues. This is the process of developing one's personality through the intellectual process of deconditioning.

The Ideology of Spirituality

According to me, true spirituality is based on contemplation or reflection or pondering, which has all to do with intellectual activity. Such spirituality is produced when man gives serious thought to such questions pertaining to the ideology of life such as, 'Who am I?' What is the purpose of my life? What is this world around me? What is the creation plan of the Creator? Is my life governed by destiny or free will? What is my purpose in life?... A seeker is able to find true spirituality by finding rational answers to such questions, whereby he receives spirituality at the mind or thinking level.

Indeed, the journey of spirituality begins with the urge to search for the truth. When a seeker discovers the truth and learns the creation plan of the Creator, his life enters a new phase, i.e. that of building of the human personality according to spiritual principles. This journey is entirely intellectual in nature. Its

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quest is two-fold, one is to solve the riddle of why, all men and women undergo negative experiences in this world and the other is to offer positive solutions. It addresses the paradox of human beings having been given the freedom to make their own moral choices, and their frequent misuse of this freedom - a course of action which causes them to repeatedly face situations in which people do each other harm; losses are incurred because of others' injustice; severe provocations are suffered because of untoward experiences. at such times spirituality teaches us to convert negativity into positivity through the art of conversion. This is the ideology of spirituality as presented in Islam.

When man raises himself above his immediate surroundings, i.e. from the material level to a higher level of thinking, he experiences real spirituality.

The Art of Conversion

When a scientist discovers the scientific world, he doesn't leave the material world, but rather stays here, studies and makes discoveries in this very world. Spirituality is also a science. Consequently, in spiritual science the same method is valid, i.e. undergoing spiritual experiences while remaining in the material world. Spirituality, in fact, is a process of converting our everyday material events into spiritual experiences. While living his social life, man is affected by events, which trigger negative thoughts such as malice, lust, anger, arrogance, greed, etc. But when man raises himself above his immediate surroundings, i.e. from the material level to a higher level of thinking, he experiences real spirituality. At this elevated level, man is able to eradicate his negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones. In this state, he learns to convert non-spiritual matters into spiritual matters.

This is the principle on which the entire material world is based. It may be called the principle or art of conversion. For instance, let us take the case of water. Two gases separately are not water, but, when they combine and convert into another form, they take the form of water. The same is true of the tree. A tree is, in fact, the result of the conversion of non-botanical matter.

True spirituality or contemplative spirituality makes a man a superman.

All these processes use the principle fo conversion. In the same way contemplative spirituality through the principle of conversion makes man spiritual. True spirituality, an intellectual activity, is a science of inner development and material things indirectly contribute towards that development. In fact, material life is made more meaningful by the pro-active role played by spirituality in intellectual refinement and the consequent progress of humanity. Spirituality does not, as some may imagine, arrest the thinking process, but rather enhances intellectual activity in the complete sense of the word. In short, true spirituality or contemplative spirituality makes a man a superman.

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